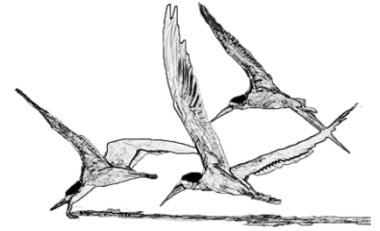


West Pasco Audubon
Conservation Notes
October 2018



Welcome back to our seasonal members! New this year is our conservation updates, bringing you news of issues impacting our local and regional ecology and wildlife. We will publish monthly newsletters highlighting events, opportunities, and key issues along with challenges you can take on to make a difference. In addition, we will be sharing conservation posts from Florida Audubon and National Audubon relevant to Pasco county and the greater Tampa Bay area on our Facebook page. We hope you enjoy learning about conservation concerns and efforts along our beautiful Gulf Coast.

Upcoming area events:

Now through February 10 - Audubon Florida and the Tampa Bay History Center present "A History of Conservation - A Bird's Eye View", on exhibit at the History Center, 801 Old Water Street, Tampa.

Now through November 25 - "Expressions of Nature" art exhibit, Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center, 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs. Saturdays and Sundays only.

October 13 - "Orchids and Epiphytes" class. 10:30. Contact Brooker Creek Preserve for more information.

October 27 - "Happy Owl Oween" children's event, 10-2. Live owls, story time, face painting, and more. Contact Brooker Creek Preserve for more information.

November 6 - General election. Don't forget to get out and vote! Early voting dates in Pasco county run from Wednesday October 24 through Saturday November 3.

Volunteer Opportunities:

October 20 - Brooker Creek Preserve Clean-Up, 8-11, Tarpon Springs. Exotic plant and trash removal. Call (727) 515-9545.

October 20 - Heartwood Preserve Volunteer Day, 9-12, Trinity. Exotic plant and trash removal. Call (727) 376-5111 by October 15 to RSVP.

From Pasco County:

In August, the Environmental Lands Acquisition and Management Program (ELAMP) of Pasco County's Natural Resources Division purchased 60 more acres in North Central Pasco for conservation, expanding the county's environmentally protected holdings in our area. The new property abuts the Masaryktown Canal in the Starkey to Crossbar Ecological Corridor.

Monthly Challenge: What can you do to help discourage toxic algae blooms?

This year's red tide has been particularly enduring and extensive. It began blooming off the southwest coast of Florida last November, slowly spread northward, and is currently affecting the waters off Pinellas County. Meanwhile cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) have been plaguing Lake Okeechobee and areas downstream since June. Both are naturally occurring, microscopic, photosynthetic organisms. Red tide and blue-green algal blooms naturally occur when conditions align and allow these populations to explode, though certain human activities exacerbate this. When these organisms become very dense several problems manifest. First, they deplete oxygen levels in the water, suffocating fish and other marine life. Moreover, the toxic compounds that they naturally produce become concentrated enough to impact animals living in or near the water, resulting in more sickness and death. So far this year, many sea turtle, manatee, and dolphin fatalities have been linked to these blooms in addition to the literally tons of fish that are floating and washing up on our shores*. Food supplies for the coastal birds in these areas are diminishing and those that remain are being poisoned. So, what causes the red tide and blue-green algal population explosions? Like many other photosynthetic organisms, they grow and reproduce when provided with abundant nutrients and toasty temperatures (among other factors). One thing we can all do to help is to stop feeding them! Or rather, **stop or cut back on fertilizing our lawns and landscaping**. Fertilizers end up running off our lawns, through our watersheds, and into the oceans during the abundant summertime rains, where they feed algae rather than landscaping. Another thing we can do is **support legislation that protects and restores wetlands and supports keeping the water in Lake Okeechobee flowing** through the Everglades. When water is retained in Lake Okeechobee it becomes stagnant and supports blooms as it collects and holds nutrients. When water is released to run through the Everglades the nutrients flow and filter naturally through the ecosystem, feeding the marsh grasses instead. This creates a healthier lake and a healthier Everglades. Other wetlands serve the same function. Finally, we can **make personal choices and support legislation that reduces global warming**.

* 49 dolphins, 103 manatees, and 212 sea turtles confirmed or suspected dead of red tide toxins so far (Mote marine aquarium, Florida Fish and Wildlife, and NOAA statistics).